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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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CITE TDCSDB-315/00518-68

DIST 12 FEBRUARY 1968

COUNTRY SOUTH VIETNAM

DOI 12 FEBRUARY 1968

SUBJECT SITUATION APPRAISAL: ANALYSIS OF VIET CONG TET OFFENSIVE

ACQ [redacted]

SOURCE [redacted]

SUMMARY: THE OBJECTIVES OF THE VIET CONG (VC) OFFENSIVE WERE TO DESTROY THE GVN/ALLIED FORCES, ELIMINATE THE GOVERNMENT OF VIETNAM (GVN) GOVERNMENTAL STRUCTURE, CREATE A GENERAL UPRISING, AND ESTABLISH A REVOLUTIONARY GOVERNMENT DOMINATED BY THE NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT (NLF). THE VC FAILED IN THESE OBJECTIVES IN WHAT APPEARS TO BE AN ALMOST INCREDIBLE MISCALCULATION OF THEIR OWN MILITARY CAPABILITIES AND THE SUPPORT THEY WOULD GET FROM THE PEOPLE. PERHAPS MORE THAN HALF THE VC FORCES USED IN THE OFFENSIVE HAVE BEEN KILLED. NEVERTHELESS, IT WAS AN IMPRESSIVE DISPLAY OF STRENGTH THAT NETTED A PSYCHOLOGICAL VICTORY

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ABROAD, DEALT THE PACIFICATION PROGRAM A SERIOUS BLOW, AND CREATED PROBLEMS THAT WILL OCCUPY THE GOVERNMENT FOR MANY MONTHS. THE MILITARY STRATEGY ENVISIONED A TWO-PHASE ATTACK; LOCAL FORCES WERE USED LARGELY IN THE FIRST PHASE WITH VC/NVA MAIN FORCES LARGELY HELD FOR THE SECOND. THE PASSIVE RESISTANCE OF THE PEOPLE PLUS THE FIERCE REACTION FORCED CANCELLATION OF THE SECOND PHASE WHICH IS STILL AVAILABLE FOR NEW ATTACKS WHICH ARE EXPECTED. ALTHOUGH WEAKENED BY HIS LOSSES, THE ENEMY IS NOT ON THE VERGE OF DESPERATION AND HE COULD CUT HIS LOSSES BY RESORT TO THE MORE TRADITIONAL HARASSING ATTACKS, ALTHOUGH THIS MIGHT LOWER MORALE IN HIS RANKS. PACIFICATION IS SET BACK AND IT WILL BE MANY MONTHS BEFORE THE CONFIDENCE OF THE PEOPLE IN THE PREVIOUSLY SECURED HAMLETS CAN BE RESTORED. END SUMMARY.

1.

1. THE YEAR OF THE MONKEY HAD AN INAUSPICIOUS BEGINNING FOR THE PEOPLE OF SOUTH VIETNAM AS THE VC/NVA FORCES VIOLATED THE SACRED TET HOLIDAYS AND LAUNCHED VIRTUALLY SIMULTANEOUS ATTACKS AGAINST 36 PROVINCE CAPITALS, FIVE OF THE SIX AUTONOMOUS CITIES, AND NUMEROUS OTHER POPULATION CENTERS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY. THEIR OBJECTIVES HAVE BEEN CLEARLY SPELLED OUT IN CAPTURED DOCUMENTS -- TO DESTROY OR SUBVERT THE GVN/ALLIED FORCES, ELIMINATE THE GVN GOVERNMENTAL STRUCTURE, CREATE A GENERAL UPRISING AMONG THE PEOPLE, AND ESTABLISH A REVOLUTIONARY GOVERNMENT DOMINATED BY THE NATIONAL

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LIBERATION FRONT. IN WHAT APPEARS TO BE AN ALMOST INCREDIBLE MISCALCULATION OF THEIR OWN MILITARY CAPABILITIES AND THE DEGREE OF SUPPORT THEY COULD COMMAND FROM THE PEOPLE, THE COMMUNISTS FAILED TO ACHIEVE THESE STATED OBJECTIVES. IT HAS COST THEM DEARLY IN MANPOWER -- IN 12 DAYS SOME 31,000 KILLED, 5,700 DETAINED, PROBABLY ANOTHER 10,000 DEAD FROM WOUNDS, AN UNKNOWN NUMBER DEAD FROM AIR AND ARTILLERY STRIKES -- A TOTAL PROBABLY AMOUNTING TO MORE THAN HALF OF THE FORCES USED IN THIS ATTACK. NEVERTHELESS, THE ENEMY'S WELL-PLANNED, COORDINATED SERIES OF ATTACKS WAS AN IMPRESSIVE DISPLAY OF STRENGTH WHICH HAS GIVEN HIM A MAJOR PSYCHOLOGICAL VICTORY ABROAD, DEALT A SERIOUS BLOW TO THE PACIFICATION PROGRAM, AND CREATED PROBLEMS THAT WILL TAX THE ENERGIES AND RESOURCES OF THE GOVERNMENT FOR MANY MONTHS TO COME.

2. THE ENEMY'S MILITARY STRATEGY CONSISTED OF A TWO-PHASE OFFENSIVE. WHEREVER POSSIBLE, THE FIRST PHASE ASSAULTS WERE CONDUCTED BY VC LOCAL FORCES. PSYCHOLOGICALLY, THIS WAS MORE APPROPRIATE THAN USING NVA UNITS, GIVEN THE ENEMY'S OBJECTIVE OF WINNING THE SUPPORT OF THE PEOPLE. VNA FORCES WERE USED IN I AND II CORPS WHERE VC FORCES WERE INADEQUATE, BUT THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY MOST VC/NVA MAIN FORCES WERE WITHHELD FOR THE SECOND PHASE WHEN THEY WOULD MOVE IN TO CAPITALIZE ON THE EXPECTED SHAOS AND GENERAL UPRISING.

3. THE PASSIVE REACTION OF THE POPULATION, THE FIERCENESS OF THE FREE WORLD AND ARVN COUNTEROFFENSIVES AFTER THE INITIAL SURPRISE AND CONFUSION, AND THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MASSIVE AIR AND ARTILLERY FIRE OBVIOUSLY FORCED CANCELLATION OF THE COMMITMENT OF VC/NVA MAIN FORCES. IT IS ESTIMATED THAT SLIGHTLY LESS THAN HALF OF THE

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ENEMY'S MAIN FORCE MANEUVER UNITS OUTSIDE OF THOSE IN THE DMZ, BUT WELL OVER HALF OF HIS LOCAL FORCE UNITS, PARTICIPATED IN THE ATTACKS. THUS, HE STILL HAS SUBSTANTIAL UNCOMMITTED FORCES AVAILABLE FOR A NEW "SECOND PHASE" ATTACK.

4. IN SPITE OF THE ENEMY'S HEAVY LOSSES, HE APPARENTLY STILL PLANS A RESUMPTION OF THE OFFENSIVE ON A LARGE SCALE IN THE NEAR FUTURE. THE FAILURE OF COMMITTED FORCES TO WITHDRAW COMPLETELY TO SAFEHAVENS AND CURRENT DISPOSITION OF PREVIOUSLY UNCOMMITTED UNITS LEND CREDENCE TO PRISONERS' STATEMENTS THAT THE SECOND PHASE OFFENSIVE WILL SOON BE INITIATED. ALTHOUGH THE VC/NVA MAIN FORCES WOULD SUPPOSEDLY BE BETTER EQUIPPED, TRAINED, AND DISCIPLINED THAN THE PRIMARILY LOW-LEVEL TROOPS (CANNON FODDER) WHICH LAUNCHED THE FIRST OFFENSIVE, THE ENEMY HAS LOST THE ELEMENT OF SURPRISE, DOES NOT HAVE THE COVER OF A TET TRUCE, AND HAS ALREADY EXPENDED A GREAT DEAL IN THE WAY OF MEN AND MATERIEL. THE CONSEQUENCE OF A SECOND "ALL-OUT" SERIES OF ATTACKS WOULD PROBABLY BE AS DISASTROUS MILITARILY AS THE FIRST PHASE. IF, INDEED, THE ENEMY IS PREPARING FOR LARGE-SCALE ATTACKS AT KHE SANH, QUANG TRI, HUE, DANANG, DAK TO, PHY MY, TUY HOA, SAIGON, CAN THO, AND MY THO, THEN HE MUST STRIKE QUICKLY. THOUGH STRETCHED THIN, ALLIED FORCES HAVE CONSOLIDATED THEIR GAINS, REGROUPED, AND INITIATED OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS AGAINST THE ENEMY'S MASSED MAIN FORCES WITH NOTABLE SUCCESS. AS TIME PASSES, HIS POSITION IS BECOMING MORE TENUOUS AND THERE WILL BE LESS AND LESS OPPORTUNITY TO ACHIEVE HIS IMMEDIATE OBJECTIVES.

5. ALTHOUGH THE ENEMY HAS BEEN SERIOUSLY WEAKENED, HE IS NOT ON THE VERGE OF DESPERATION. HE HAS OVER HALF OF HIS MAIN FORCES BASICALLY INTACT WITH MORE

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MEN AND MATERIEL ENROUTE OR AVAILABLE FROM NVN. HE HAS TAKEN SUBSTANTIAL LOSSES IN THE PAST AND SHOWN AN AMAZING DEGEE OF RESILIENCY. ON THE OTHER HAND, HIS LOGISTICS AND RECRUITMENT PROBLEMS WILL BE GREATLY INCREASED WITH SUCH HEAVY LOSSES FROM THE LOCAL AND GUERRILLA FORCES WHO PROVIDE MANPOWER FOR SUPPORT AND COMBAT.

6. AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO A SECOND ASSAULT AGAINST THE CITIES, THE ENEMY COULD ELECT TO CUT HIS LOSSES BY REVERTING TO MORE TRADITIONAL HARASSING ATTACKS WHILE ATTEMPTING TO IMPROVE HIS POSITION IN THE COUNTRYSIDE. THE RECENT WELL-COORDINATED ATTACKS OVER WIDESPREAD AREAS PROVED THE ENEMY'S CAPABILITY TO UTILIZE THIS TACTIC. SUCH ATTACKS ON A SMALLER SCALE WOULD STILL GAIN HEADLINES AND HAVE CONSIDERABLE PSYCHOLOGICAL APPEAL AND VALUE TO THE ENEMY AS THEY RERAISE QUESTIONS IN SVN AND THE WORLD AS TO THE ABILITY OF THE ALLIES TO PROVIDE SECURITY TO THE PEOPLE. HOWEVER, AFTER SUCH EXTENSIVE INDOCTRINATION ON THE INEVITABILITY OF IMMINENT VICTORY, A REVERSION TO ESSENTIALLY GUERRILLA WARFARE WOULD PROBABLY CAUSE SEVERE PROBLEMS OF MORALE AMONG THE CADRES AND A LOSS OF IMPETUS FOR THE REVOLUTIONARY EFFORT.

7. IT IS NOT YET POSSIBLE TO MAKE A FIRM ASSESSMENT OF THE DAMAGE WHICH HAS BEEN CAUSED TO THE PACIFICATION PROGRAM, BUT IT PROBABLY HAS BEEN EXTENSIVE. THE PACIFIED AREAS DID NOT AT LEAST INITIALLY APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN A PRIORITY TARGET, PROBABLY BECAUSE MOST OF THE VC GUERRILLAS WERE DRAWN INTO LOCAL FORCE UNITS FOR THE CITY BATTLES OR WERE ENGAGED IN INTERDICTING LOCS. HOWEVER, GVN FORCES PROVIDING SECURITY FOR THE PACIFIED AREAS AND THE RD TEAMS WERE IN MANY CASES WITHDRAWN TO ASSIST IN THE DEFENSE OF URBAN AREAS, LEAVING THE VC FREE TO PENETRATE PREVIOUSLY SECURED HAMLETS AND

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CONDUCT PROPAGANDA, RECRUIT, ACQUIRE FOOD, ELIMINATE THE GVN ADMINISTRATION, AND OCCASIONALLY TERRORIZE THE POPULATION. THE IMPACT OF THE VC PRESENCE WAS ESPECIALLY SEVERE IN THE LARGER HAMLETS WHICH GENERALLY ARE LOCATED CLOSE TO THE POPULATION CENTERS AND WERE ON THE VC ROUTE OF ENTRY. THIS ACTIVITY WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR PART OF THE LARGE REFUGEE FLOW INTO THE CITIES.

8. WITH MANY OF THE CITIES IN SHAMBLES AND REQUIRING PRIORITY RECONSTRUCTION AND REHABILITATION EFFORTS, THE DEVELOPMENT ASPECTS OF THE PROGRAM ALMOST INEVITABLY WILL SUFFER. IN ANY EVENT, IT WILL BE MANY MONTHS BEFORE THE CONFIDENCE OF THE PEOPLE IN THE PREVIOUSLY SECURED HAMLETS CAN BE RESTORED, SOME OF WHICH FELT THE VC PRESENCE FOR THE FIRST TIME. ONE POSSIBLY HOPEFUL SIGN IS THAT MANY OF THE VC EXPRESSED SURPRISE AT THE RELATIVE PROSPERITY OF THE PEOPLE IN THE GVN AREAS, CONTRARY TO WHAT THEY HAD BEEN LED TO BELIEVE. THIS, TOGETHER WITH THE MILITARY DEFEAT AND HEAVY LOSSES, SHOULD CONTRIBUTE TO SOME FUTURE DEFECTIONS.

9. THERE HAS NATURALLY BEEN A MIXED REACTION FROM THE PEOPLE TO THE COMMUNIST ONSLAUGHT -- INITIALLY, IT WAS ONE OF SHOCK AT THE STRENGTH OF THE ATTACK, AND ANGER AT ITS PERFIDY. HOWEVER, EVEN THOSE SKEPTICS WHO WOULD NOT PREVIOUSLY ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THE LARGE ELECTORAL TURNOUTS, THE INABILITY OF THE VC TO GET A RESPONSE TO CALLS FOR A GENERAL STRIKE, AND THE ALMOST TOTALLY CONSCRIPT NATURE OF THE VC FORCES WERE PROOF THAT THE VC LACKED POPULAR SUPPORT, CAN HARDLY DENY IT NOW. DESPITE THE CREATION OF A REVOLUTIONARY ADMINISTRATION, SUPPOSEDLY UNTAINTED BY ASSOCIATION WITH THE NLF, NO SIGNIFICANT ELEMENT OF THE POPULATION OR OF THE ARMED FORCES DEFECTED. [redacted]

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PEOPLE TO RESPOND TO THE VC CALL FOR AN UPRISING, AND IN FACT OFTEN TO RENDER ASSISTANCE TO THE GOVERNMENT FORCES, WAS THE KEY TO THE FAILURE OF THE VC PLAN, AND IS ONE OF THE MOST ENCOURAGING ASPECTS OF THE WHOLE AFFAIR.

10. THERE ARE NEGATIVE FACTORS, OF COURSE -- THE PEOPLE NOW HAVE A GREATER RESPECT FOR THE CAPABILITIES OF THE VC, AND THIS WILL PROBABLY RESULT IN SOME CASES IN A MORE CAUTIOUS ATTITUDE TOWARD OPEN SUPPORT FOR THE GOVERNMENT. THERE IS CRITICISM OVER THE GOVERNMENT'S LACK OF PREPAREDNESS, CHARGES OF EXCESSIVE PROPERTY DAMAGE AND CIVILIAN CASUALTIES, AND LOOTING BY THE COUNTERREACTION FORCES, AND A PERSISTENT BELIEF THAT SOMEHOW THE UNITED STATES WAS IN COLLUSION WITH THE VC. HOWEVER, THE POPULATION IS UNIVERSALLY ANGRY AT THE VC FOR VIOLATING BOTH A SACRED HOLIDAY AND THEIR OWN TRUCE, AND THE BLAME FOR ALL OF THE ILLS IS GENERALLY PLACED ON THE VC. THERE WAS LEFT NO DOUBT IN THE MINDS OF THE PEOPLE AS TO THE SUPERIORITY OF THE GOVERNMENT FORCES AND AS TO WHO WON THIS ENGAGEMENT. ON BALANCE, WE FEEL THAT IN THE CONTEST FOR THE MINDS AND HEARTS OF THE PEOPLE, THE VC HAVE SO FAR SUFFERED A SEVERE LOSS. IN COMMON DANGER, THERE WAS A TENDENCY TO UNITE BEHIND THE GOVERNMENT. WITH A RESIDUE OF ILL WILL TOWARD THE VC WHICH WILL NOT BE EASILY ERASED, THE TASK OF NATION-BUILDING, AT LEAST IN THOSE AREAS STILL UNDER GOVERNMENT CONTROL, SHOULD BECOME A LITTLE EASIER. MUCH WILL DEPEND, HOWEVER, ON THE SKILL AND ALACRITY WITH WHICH THE GOVERNMENT HANDLES THE SEVERE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PROBLEMS IT FACES.

11. THE DAYS AHEAD CONSTITUTE A SEVERE TEST FOR THE GVN. THERE IS NO QUESTION BUT THAT THE GOVERNMENT SUFFERED A SERIOUS LOSS OF PRESTIGE BY ITS

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INABILITY TO DEFEND ITS CITIES, NOTWITHSTANDING, THERE HAS BEEN AT LEAST A TEMPORARY TENDENCY ON THE PART OF NATIONALIST LEMENTS TO SET ASIDE THEIR PAROCHIAL INTERESTS AND RALLY BEHIND THE LEADERSHIP. THIS IS BY NO MEANS UNIVERSAL -- THE MILITANT BUDDHISTS, THE DAI VIETS, AND SOME OTHERS STILL HAVE REFUSED EITHER PUBLICLY TO CONDEMN THE VC OR TO SUPPORT THE GOVERNMENT ACTIVELY. ALTHOUGH IT WAS AN AMERICAN IDEA, CLEARLY THE MOST EFFECTIVE ACTION BY THE GOVERNMENT SO FAR WAS THE CREATION OF THE JOINT VIETNAMESE/AMERICAN TASK FORCE UNDER VICE PRESIDENT KY TO HANDLE THE IMMEDIATE PROBLEMS OF REHABILITATION. WHATEVER CLOSING OF RANKS BEHIND THE GOVERNMENT THAT HAS ACCRUED CAN BE CREDITED LARGELY TO KY, WHO HAS EMERGED AS THE "MAN OF THE HOUR." DESPITE AGGRAVATING AND BUREAUCRATIC PROBLEMS, SOME FORWARD MOVEMENT HAS BEEN MADE IN RE-ESTABLISHING ESSENTIAL FACILITIES AND SERVICES. KY MAY WELL HAVE SAVED THE GVN FROM PROJECTING ITS USUAL IMAGE OF INACTIVITY.

12. WE ARE NOT SANGUINE ABOUT FUTURE POLITICAL PROBLEMS. THE SCHISMS WHICH DIVIDE THIS SOCIETY ARE DEEPLY ROOTED, AND WILL INEVITABLY ARISE AGAIN AS THE FIRST FLUSH OF UNITY BEGINS TO FADE. DEMANDS WILL BE MADE FOR THE REMOVAL OF OFFICIALS, BOTH NATIONAL AND LOCAL, WHO PROVED UNEQUAL TO THE TASK IN A CIRSIS, AND THIS WILL BE CERTAIN TO RESTORE THE ENDEMIC FACTIONAL INFIGHTING. THE MILITARY, SOME OF THE CATHOLICS, AND THOSE FAVORING A ROUGH, DIRECTED SYSTEM WILL FAULT THE GOVERNMENT FOR NOT BEING TOUGH ENOUGH, WHILE OTHERS WILL BE CONCERNED OVER EVEN THE TEMPORARY SACRIFICE OF DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES AND THE CONTINUED PRE-EMINENT ROLE OF THE MILITARY. THE CRISIS HAS IGNITED A SPARK OF UNITY, BUT TO SUSTAIN IT WILL REQUIRE A SUCCESSFUL RELIEF AND RECOVERY OPERATION

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AND A SUBLIMINATION OF PERSONAL AND PARTISAN POLITICAL INTERSTS WHICH THIS SOCIETY HAS NEVER BEFORE DEMONSTRATED.

13. THE COMMUNISTS CAN BE CREDITED WITH HAVING MAINTAINED EXCELLENT SECURITY FOR SU A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN, BUT THEY ARE GUILTY OF A MASSIVE INTELLIGENCE FAILURE. DOCUMENTS CAPTURED OVER THE PAST FOUR MONTHS AND INTERROGATIONS OF THE PRISONERS INVOLVED IN THE RECENT ATTACKS INDICATE QUITE CLEARLY THAT THE VC DID INTEND TO TAKE AND HOLD THE CITIES, DID EXPECT A GENERAL UPRISING, AND DID PLAN TO INSTALL A REVOLUTIONARY GOVERNMENT, AS EVIDENCED BY THE PRESENCE OF A STANDBY VC ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE IN THE MAJOR CITIES. IT MAY SEEM INCREDIBLE THAT VC EXPECTATIONS SHOULD HAVE BEEN SO DIVORCED FROM REALITY, BUT THERE ARE THREE FACTORS WHICH PROBABLY EXPLAIN THIS. FIRST, THE COMMUNISTS ARE AND ALWAYS HAVE BEEN VICTIMS OF THEIR DOCTRINE, AND IN THE PRESENT CASE THE ARTICLES OF FAITH WERE: "THE LONGER WE FIGHT, THE STRONGER WE BECOME;" AND, "THE MORE VICIOUSLY THE ENEMY FIGHTS, THE CLOSER HE IS TO COLLAPSE;" AND, "THE PEOPLE SUPPORT US AND WHEN THE URBAN PEOPLE HAVE THE CHANCE TO RISE UP, OUR VICTORY WILL BE ASSURED." SECOND, THE LEADERS HAVE BEEN CONSISTENTLY AND GREATLY MISINFORMED BY LOWER CADRES. GIVEN THE DOCTRINAL BIAS ALLUDED TO ABOVE AND THE ORIENTAL PENCHANT FOR TELLING PEOPLE WHAT THEY WANT TO HEAR, THE REPORTS GOING UPWARD HAVE SO MISINTERPRETED THE FACTS THAT THE LEADERS COULD NOT BASE THEIR DECISIONS ON REALITY. THIRD, THE NEED FOR A SIGNIFICANT VICTORY AFTER TWO YEARS OF DROUGHT MAY HAVE INTRODUCED A LACK OF PRUDENCE. BY ANY RATIONAL STAND NORTH VIETNAM HAS BEEN LOSING TOO MUCH IN ORDER TO GAIN TOO LITTLE. FOR TOO LONG, VC STRENGTH AND SUPPORT HAS BEEN DWINDLING. THE ENTIRE NATURE OF THE WAR, THE

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ENTIRE ENVIRONMENT OF THE STRUGGLE, CHANGED WITH THE MASSIVE UNITED STATES INVOLVEMENT. THE TET ASSAULT MUST HAVE BEEN PART OF AN EXPECTED VC PLAN TO INFLICT HEAVY PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DAMAGE IN HOPE OF GAINING, IF NOT ALL THEIR OBJECTIVES, SOMETHING WHICH COULD BE CONSTRUED AS A VICTORY.

14. WE ARE VERY MUCH AWARE THAT WE HAVE PROBABLY SEEN ONLY THE FIRST OF A TWO-ACT DRAMA. IF THE SECOND ACT REPEATS THE SCENARIO, WE WILL SERIOUSLY QUESTION THE ABILITY OF HANOI TO CONTINUE TO CARRY ON THIS KIND OF CONVENTIONAL WARFARE FOR A PROTRACTED PERIOD. WHATEVER ELSE MAY FOLLOW, THE TET OFFENSIVE IN SOUTH VIETNAM, CONTRARY TO MUCH FOREIGN OPINION, IS NOT POPULARLY REGARDED HERE EITHER AS A VC VICTORY OR EVEN AC AN INDICATION OF THEIR EVENTUAL SUCCESS. THERE IS A SOBERING THOUGHT FOR THE FUTURE, HOWEVER — IF IT WERE NOT FOR THE PRESENCE OF UNITED STATES FORCES, THE VC FLAY WOULD BE FLYING OVER MUCH OF SOUTH VIETNAM TODAY.

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